

## **In pursuit of “systemic” solutions to poverty**

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Calgary is the nation’s fastest growing major city. Also growing is the community’s “wealth gap.” According to the 2001 Census figures, the poorest 10% of the city’s residents had an average annual income of \$13,000 while families in the top 10% averaged annual incomes of \$248,600.

The members of Vibrant Communities Calgary believe that all Calgarians have the right to fully access the economic, social and political life of their community. However, poverty limits this participation.

Through the support of MCC Employment Development and the United Way of Calgary and Area, representatives from community groups, labour unions, foundations, governments, health care organizations and businesses have put together a plan to help 1,000 people in their journey out of poverty and set the stage for substantially reducing the wealth gap in the future.

To accomplish this, the group has chosen to focus on uncovering and pursuing “systemic” solutions to poverty that offer the possibility of large scale impacts. One way is to identify and reduce policy barriers that weigh heavily on the community’s most vulnerable citizens – such as inadequate income support programs and ensuring affordable public transportation. Vibrant Communities Calgary is also exploring how to better engage the business community to help address the issues faced by the working poor by exploring healthier workplace practices and good wages.

The work of the growing membership in Vibrant Communities Calgary goes far beyond the many smaller scale efforts around the City, but as one member of the collaboration notes, “Big problems require big solutions – we have to try some new approaches if we are ever going to make the kind of difference most Calgarians would like to see.”

